

African Americans Make Impact In Peace Corps

By DANA HALLMAN

This is a story dedicated to the Tanzanians, with whom I lived for two years as a Peace Corps volunteer. It is a story about their kindred spirit, ingenuity and compassion. And it is a story told for the village elder whose words still remain with me to this day.

"When you return to America, carry this message with you," the old man told me as I was leaving Ichenjezya in the foothills of Tanzania's Rift Valley Mountains. "Tell our brothers and sisters, long since stolen from these shores that they too are welcome. Tell them to come and see for themselves what a great place this is.

"Tell, them, yes that we are poor and that life here is not easy," he said. "Say that we work hard and wish for our children good health and a good education so that their lives are not as difficult as their fathers before them. Tell them that although we speak a different language our hopes for our children are not that different than the hopes they have for their own. Yes, they too are welcome and as you return home do not forget us. Let our Brothers and Sisters in America know that their struggle is our struggle and our struggle theirs. Take with you these greetings in peace."

September 1983

As the Swiss airliner made its descent at sunrise into Tanzania's international airport in Dar-es-Salaam, the view unfolding below revealed a land rich in natural beauty, unspoiled by the concrete reality of modern day development.

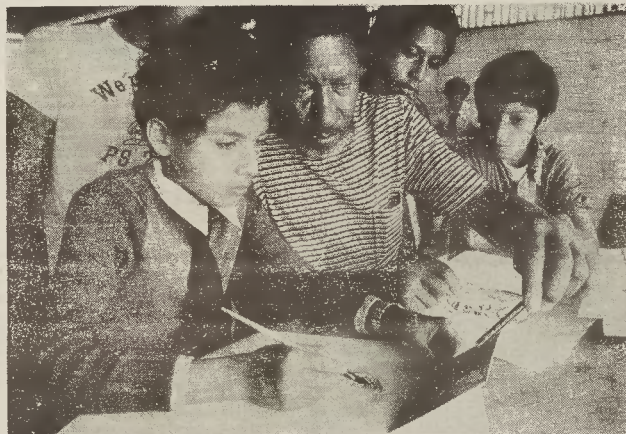
Spirals of smoke rose over the lush green landscape as farmers tended their fields for the approaching planting season.

As the jet set down on the runway, my group of 21 Peace Corps trainees scrambled for the few belongings we were allowed to carry onto the plane. There was a sense of excitement mixed with anxiety. Two months of intense training in the United States had ended and, having finally reached our destiny, we all were relieved and ready to begin a new adventure.

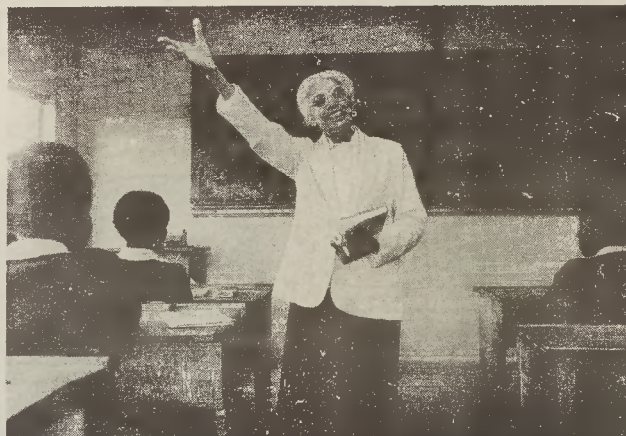
Stepping off the plane, we felt the warm tropical sun beating down. One long journey was ending, another just beginning. I had dreamed of living in Africa, of learning about a culture and people that were so foreign in many ways and yet so much a part of me and my cultural background. But I had come less in search of my roots and more in search of some untold truth about this great continent. I felt the only way I could develop my own ideas and convictions about world issues -- especially those concerning people of color was to experience life in a developing nation.

Although, I knew that there was much starvation and political strife in many countries in the developing world I also knew that there must be more than the continual negative images portrayed by the media. I wanted to develop an understanding that went far beyond the mystique of the Masai warriors and the wildlife

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Black Americans are working in a wide variety of areas as Peace Corps volunteers. Clay G. Young of Los Angeles teaches Ecuadoran students design for graphic arts and photo mechanics. Young is one of a growing number of senior Americans who are joining the Peace Corps after retirement.



You are never too old to join the Peace Corps. Dorothy Bullock Hamilton's 20 years of teaching experience is a valuable resource for the town of Limuru, Kenya. At age 72, Hamilton teaches physics and English as a Peace Corps volunteer.